National Institutes of Health Visiting Fellows Committee

NIHVFC Newsletter

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Contributing to global science development by building careers

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6th International Opportunities Expo

By Dr. Shadia Zaman

The 6th International Opportunities Expo was held on April 2nd at the Natcher Conference Center. At the Expo, international organizations that fund scientific research were invited to give presentations and information about grants that post-doctoral fellows could apply for when they start looking for research positions outside of the US. In addition, the Expo has the unique feature of inviting embassies thus allowing fellows to interact with embassy staff and hear about research careers in the respective countries. This year, the Expo had the highest turnout of exhibitors, with 15 embassies and 15 international organizations attending the event and giving NIH fellows an opportunity to network with them and be informed about grants and job opportunities as they plan for the next step forward in their scientific careers.

The Expo started off at twelve thirty in the afternoon with a keynote speech given by Dr. Jeffrey Boutwell, the Executive Director of Pugwash Conferences on Science and World

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Science Voices from Home

By Dr. Shadia Zaman

This summer was a busy season for the Science Voices from Home seminar series. This is a seminar series that the Visiting Fellows Committee (VFC) organizes with the help of OITE to give visiting fellows an opportunity to meet with established and successful investigators from their home countries. The fellows meet with the investigators in an informal setting and get to hear and discuss about research careers available to fellows once they go back to their countries.

From India, the VFC hosted Dr. G. Bhanuprakash Reddy. Dr. Reddy is the Assistant Director at the National Institute of Nutrition (NIN) in Hyderabad, India. He discussed his

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6th International Opportunities Expo (continued from Page 1)

Affairs. The Pugwash Conferences was founded in 1957 and brings together world leaders to discuss methods to prevent the threat of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction and protect human society. The organization was built on the Bertrand Russell-Albert Einstein Manifesto of 1955 that urged world leaders to renounce nuclear weapons and it also emphasizes that it is the duty of scientists to prevent the misuse of scientific technology while at the same time promoting its beneficial applications. The Pugwash Conferences was recognized for its mission to promote peace and security by being awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1995.

At the Expo, Dr. Jeffrey Boutwell discussed the operations of the Pugwash Conferences by describing how it works in different cultural settings. The Pugwash Conferences has a goal of trying to bring scientific insight into the societal problems arising from nuclear, biological and chemical weapons. Some of the other issues the Pugwash Conferences deals with are the challenges posed by advances in agricultural biotechnology and the spread of HIV/AIDS in developing countries. Finally, he also said that the Conferences discusses the responsibilities of scientists, trying to highlight and make them aware of the moral and ethical implications of their scientific research.

The keynote speech was followed by several parallel breakout sessions during which organizations gave short presentations on funding and research opportunities available outside of the US. One of the organizations, Fundacion Progresso y Salud, spoke about research opportunities in Spain. Fundacion Progresso y Salud is an organization that belongs to the Andalusian Regional Ministry of Health in Spain. It manages the public health system in Andalusia and they described the establishment of new research institutes that were focused on disease-oriented research and were hiring many researchers at the senior post-doc level.

Many of the embassies, such as the embassy of New Zealand, Germany, Austria, UK and Canada, gave presentations and described the grant system for research in their countries. Each of these embassies have staff who are dedicated to promoting science and technology research in their countries and they were very helpful in providing information and following up on questions that fellows had.

Besides the presentations, each of the organizations and embassies attending the Expo also had booths where they distributed information about research in their respective countries. During this time, fellows were able to go around and network with organization and embassy staff. This Expo was a great career-advancement opportunity for both US-born post-doctoral fellows who are interested in advancing their careers in an international setting and also for visiting fellows who make up more than 60% of the post-doctoral fellows at NIH (see table on page 3).

Fellows who attended the meeting were happy to have the opportunity to attend an event like the International Opportunities Expo particularly because it was focused on giving information about international grants and research opportunities. For one fellow who was interviewing at a company in Switzerland, he found the Expo beneficial because he was able to become informed on issues relevant to the region through his interaction with the Swiss embassy staff and was well prepared for his interview at the company.

From the fellows who attended the Expo, 44% were from Asia, 28% were European, 21% were North American and 5% were South American (numbers are from a feedback questionnaire submitted by fellows). The fellows found the Expo to be useful with a mean response of 7 on a scale of 0 (not useful) and 10 (useful). About 35% of the fellows plan to go back to their country of origin after completing their current fellowship at NIH. Another 16% were planning to stay in the US while 41% where undecided about where they would go after completing their fellowship.

When the survey participants were asked about how long they have been at NIH, most of the participants (43%) responded that they have been here less than 1 year. About 19% were here for 1-2 years, 21% for 2-3 years and 17% for

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Science Voices from Home (continued from Page 1)

views on career and grant opportunities in India. Dr. Reddy, himself, is the recipient of several research grants from the Department of Biotechnology, Department of Science and Technology (DST), Life Sciences Research Board and the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR). The fellows attending the seminar were informed that there are several fellowships in India that they could apply for when applying for faculty positions such as the Wellcome Trust/ DBT India Alliance fellowship and the Ramalingaswami fellowship.

Dr. Reddy gave useful advises about applying for jobs in India and said that it is very important to visit the recruiting institute and talk to the professors and investigators before deciding to take up a position there. The fellows really got a flavor of the research environment in India from Dr. Reddy. He warned fellows to be aware of the bureaucracy in India, because of which things took a longer time than in the US. On the other hand, the good news was that many new institutes were opening up and were hiring 100-150 faculties which meant that a lot of jobs are going to be available in India. Most of these jobs will be teaching positions versus hard-core research. For research positions, his advice was to choose research areas wisely based on what will be easier to conduct in India. For example, when studying viral pathogenesis, it is easier to conduct research involving clinical samples than one that required developing a mouse model. Overall, he left an impression that the research environment in India was vibrant with a lot of funding and many jobs opening up in the near future.

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6th International Opportunities Expo
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Visiting Fellows by country at NIH

Country	Post-doc VF	Pre-doc VF	Country	Post-doc VF	Pre-doc VF
Algeria	1		South Korea	168	2
Argentina	20	1	Lebanon	3	
Armenia	1		Macedonia	1	
Australia	16	1	Madagascar	1	
Austria	6	2	Malaysia	4	
Bangladesh	4	1	Mali	1	
Belarus	2		Mexico	19	2
Belgium	5	1	Mongolia	6	
Bolivia	2		Morocco	1	
Brazil	30		Netherlands	9	3
Bulgaria	3	1	New Zealand	5	
Burkina Faso	2		Nigeria	3	1
Canada	53		Norway	4	
Chile	5	3	Pakistan	3	
China	336	11	Panama	1	
Columbia	5		Peru	4	
Cyprus	1		Philippines	5	
Czech Republic	10		Poland	22	
Denmark	4		Portugal	1	3
Ecuador	2		Romania	7	1
Egypt	4		Russia	33	1
Finland	7		Serbia	1	
France	86	5	Singapore	4	
Georgia	1		Slovakia	8	
Germany	73	6	South Africa	4	
Greece	9		Spain	36	2
Haiti		1	Sri Lanka	3	
Hong Kong	10	6	Sweden	14	3
Hungary	18	2	Switzerland	6	
Iceland	1		Syria	1	
India	252	6	Taiwan	27	
Indonesia	1		Thailand	12	
Iran	1		Tobago	2	
Ireland	10		Tunisia	1	
Israel	49	3	Turkey	6	3
Italy	82	5	Ukraine	8	
Japan	207	1	United Kingdom	53	
Kenya	2				

* data up to data as of October 2008

greater than 3 years. When asked how long they planned on staying at NIH, there was an equal split between the four categories: 24% would stay <1 year, 31% would stay 1-2 years, 21% would stay 2-3 years and 24% would stay greater than 3 years.

The fellows were also asked if they were aware that Visiting Fellows could apply for the K99/R00 grants and GRIP award and about 51% were aware of it and about 35% planned to apply for it.

The International Opportunities Expo is an event that the Visiting Fellows Committee organizes in collaboration with the Fogarty International Center and OITE. Fellows who attended the Expo found it to be very beneficial because they obtained a lot of information about international research opportunities and were able to directly talk to officials and clarify their questions.

Science Voices from Home (continued from Page 3)

From Japan, Dr. Riki Kurokawa, an investigator at Saitama Medical University Research Center for Genomic Medicine, gave a seminar on research life in Japan. Dr. Kurokawa had spend 13 years in the US conducting research at University of California, San Diego and at the Uniformed Services University and had then successfully transitioned to an investigator position at Saitama Medical University. At the seminar, Dr. Kurokawa, shared his experience about the culture shock he faced when he moved back to Japan after his stay in the US. He also advised fellows who are interested in moving to Japan that the optimal time to move back was after three years of post-doc or after starting a tenure-track position in the US. In addition, he advised that establishing and maintaining strong collaborative relationships with colleagues in the US will help young investigators in successfully starting up their own labs when they return to Japan.

Dr. Kurokawa's seminar was greatly enjoyed by the fellows who attended it because he gave a lot of useful advice about starting up a lab in Japan. In addition, this event allowed fellows to network with other Japanese fellows at NIH. For fellows, who are new at NIH, this was a great opportunity to meet with an investigator who has been successful in starting up a lab in Japan and also in meeting fellow post-docs.

Finally, from Italy, Dr. Paolo Bernardi met with NIH fellows and discussed research life in Italy. Dr. Bernardi is the Director of the Department of Biomedical Sciences at the University of Padova in Italy. During his career, he spent time as an EMBO fellow in Helsinki, Finland, as a Fogarty fellow at MIT and as a Visiting professor at the Oregon Clinical and Translational Research Institute. He has received grants from NIH and the Italian Ministry for the University and Scientific Research. Dr. Bernardi met with fellows and openly discussed about what research areas and universities were promising for a successful career. He shared a lot of insight about research in Italy and also in the wider European arena.

Dr. Bernardi meets with NIH fellows

Visiting Fellows Social

Friday 23rd October

5-11 pm

FAES House

Come join us and meet other visiting fellows at the FAES house

Bring your family and friends

Watch your Emails

More Details to Come Soon!

In Profile :Dr. Batu Erman, GRIP Award Winner

I am an Associate Professor in the Biological Sciences and Bioengineering Program of the Faculty of Engineering and Natural Sciences at Sabanci University in Istanbul, Turkey. My laboratory and our research, has been partially funded by the NIH (http://people.sabanciuniv.edu/~batu). My laboratory conducts basic research in immunology using molecular biology techniques. I am currently training 6 students at the MSc, 2 students at the PhD level and 2 post-doctoral scientists. We study the tissue specific regulation of genes important for immune system cell survival and differentiation. Specifically, we try to understand how T lymphocytes get signals in the thymus to mature into cells that form a functional immune system.

I was a research fellow in Dr. Alfred Singer's laboratory in the Experimental Immunology Branch of the National Cancer Institute from 1998 to 2004. This was an amazing experience, where I generated various transgenic, knock-out and knock-in mice to understand thymocyte development. Towards the end of my fellowship I decided to move back to Turkey, which I had left right after graduating from high school in 1987. My aim was to create an excellent molecular biology and immunology research environment in Turkey, similar to those that I was exposed to in the United States.

In this respect our laboratory is not unique: there are many young, enthusiastic, ambitious life scientists who are setting up shop in Turkish Universities. These young scientists choose to teach and conduct research in Turkey not because this is a "safe" choice, but for the thrill of choosing the challenging alternative to staying in the United States after a post-doctoral fellowship. To do this, we must tackle issues and problems that may not exist in North America, Western-Europe or Japan, in addition to the customary hardships of conducting research. This is a generation of scientists not afraid to conduct research in the "periphery" rather than the "center". There are different rules, disadvantages but also advantages of doing research in the periphery.

Luckily, there are various resources that support starting scientists to initiate their independent research programs. My laboratory receives support from two of these programs funded by the Fogarty International Center at the NIH. The first of these grants is entitled Global Research Initiative Program for New Foreign Investigators (GRIP) and the second, Fogarty International Research Collaboration Award (FIRCA). Like most grant applications, success with these grants depends on conquering the language of the multitudinous reference documents, acronyms and eligibility requirements. The GRIP grant requires you to have conducted research supported by the NIH and to decide to continue your research in a developing country (a perfect match for my situation). The FIRCA grant requires you to collaborate with a scientist who already has an extramural (that means a university or research institute outside of the NIH) "big" RO1 grant.

I was successful in my third application to the GRIP and my second application to the FIRCA. This brings me to my first (and most important) advice to future applicants to these grants: if you are unsuccessful in your first attempt, do not give up. Each granting agency has a set of unwritten rules they operate with. Rumor has it that at the NIH, it is almost impossible to get an application funded the first time around. I actually think this is fair, my third GRIP application was much more focused and realistic than my first.

After each unsuccessful application you will receive a "summary statement" that contains amazingly detailed critiques of your application from different members of the committee that evaluated it. My second advice would be to listen to these critiques carefully and modify your grant application accordingly. You may know the research subject in depth, but my guess is that the scientists who do the reviewing are exceptionally experienced in reading between the lines and deciding if something you propose is doable or a fantasy! To really understand the critiques you also will have to learn to read between the lines. The critiques are generally written with a positive tone, so you may be fooled to think that everything is positive-so why did they reject the application?

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In Profile :Dr. Batu Erman, GRIP Award Winner

In my case my "major weakness is poorly described experimental approaches that lack relevant experimental details…with insufficient discussion of anticipated results and outcomes". I hadn't thought of how I would do the experiments. Clear enough! I got the message the third time around. There was also the issue of independence from my post-doctoral advisor. Some of the experiments I proposed required collaborating with a lab that had an animal facility. My old lab was the best choice for this but they didn't want to give money for research that is already being funded by the NIH intramural program. This also makes sense now. I hadn't talked about the arrangements with enough detail.

If you are thinking of going to Europe, you will learn that European science is very different than US science: everything has to be collaborative and interdisciplinary. In my mind this is contradictory to the nature of scientist, we are selfish individualists, but of course one can find ways to be "interdisciplinary" while doing one's own focused research. European science is funded by "framework programs" with several focus areas that last 5 years and then change focus. We are now in the middle of the 7th FW program (also called FP7).

You will find that the European Research Council (ERC) and Marie Curie (MC) Actions under FP7, fund young scientists just starting their new labs. I got support from two MC grants, one called an international re-integration grant (IRG), which is similar to the NIH GRIP, and another called a research-training network (RTN). You thought the people at the NIH liked acronyms! The Europeans go crazy with them! There is also the European Molecular Biology Organization (EMBO), which is not affiliated with the FP7 but funds "installation grants". I was too old for those. Many of these starting grants require you to have received your PhD degree within 8-10 years, or to be younger than 40. My third advice: you have to learn to be at the right place at the right time! It's not advantageous in the long run to try to finish that last paper in your post-doctoral lab if lingering around too long results in loosing your eligibility for a starting grant.

So am I happy I moved? I joke with friends that had I stayed in the US and found a tenure track job, my work days would only consist of sitting in front of my computer and writing for grants and not doing what I was trained to do all my career: Benchwork! Well… Now that I have chosen an alternative career path, one that does not have the demands and stresses of the tenure track process, all I do is sit in front of my computer and write for grants! Actually this is not totally true, at Sabanci University I get to do research and teach at the same time. 30% of my time is dedicated to teaching, I teach 3 courses a year and actually I like it! You would be surprised what basics you don't know and what undergraduate students can teach you! To be successful in your career you must learn to productively interact with a younger generation of scientists, and often what motivates you, may not motivate them. My final piece of advice would be to make an attractive website describing your work. This is the best way to attract a younger generation of graduate students and post-doctoral fellows.

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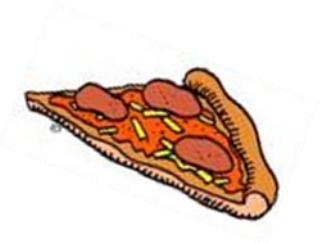

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NIH VFC by-laws

The following change has been made in the NIH VFC by-laws:

"VFC will elect from within its membership up to three leaders. One of these leaders will be called chair and will be subject to FelCom by-laws in respect to being either an IC or At-large appointee. This chair will represent the VFC to all FelCom meetings. The other leader(s) will serve the VFC committee as co-chairs and not be subject to FelCom IC/At-large appointments. If for some reason no current members of the VFC would take the Chair position of the subcommittee, then VFC will follow the current FelCom protocols to find the Chair."

The NIHVFC is a self-governing body serving the interests of visiting fellows in their transition to life after the NIH by working to create opportunities for visiting fellows to maintain continuity in their research upon returning to their home countries.

We are on the Web!
http://felcom.od.nih.gov/subCommittee/vfc/index.html